

Washington State Patrol Media Release

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For Immediate Release
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Benson Sentenced for the Murder of DOL Auditor Erdman

Ralph H. Benson was convicted of 1st degree murder in Lincoln County Superior Court on November 13, 2003, following an extensive homicide investigation by the Washington State Patrol Spokane Criminal Investigation Unit. The State Patrol Criminal Investigation Division conducted an 18-month investigation regarding the death of Department of Licensing Auditor Roger W. Erdman. Lincoln County Superior Court Judge Phillip Borst sentenced Ralph H. Benson today, December 11, 2003. The Lincoln County Prosecutor Ron Sheppard has asked for a sentence of 58 years, and the judge handed Benson a sentence of 31.6 years. He will not be eligible for parole until he has served 27 1/2 years.

On June 18, 2002, Lincoln County Sheriff John Coley asked the Washington State Patrol to lead the homicide investigation. The case was assigned to the WSP Criminal Investigation Unit (CIU) in Spokane. The investigation was led by Sergeant Ken Wade and included his six detectives. Detective Ron Snowden was assigned as the lead detective and prepared the case file for the Lincoln County Prosecutor.

WSP detectives spent 3,156 hours on the investigation, serving 20 search warrants on locations in Washington and Arizona. Detectives spent 17 days searching Benson's property. Detectives collected 321 pieces of evidence such as a bullet, hair and blood samples, clothing, and critical DNA evidence. 105 items of evidence were submitted to the Washington State Patrol Spokane Crime Lab. At the conclusion of the investigation, the case file submitted to the prosecutor contained 24 statements, six diagrams, extensive background information on Benson and his properties, phone records, audio and video tapes, over 1,200 photographs, forensic reports, and the 321 pieces of evidence.

The WSP Spokane CIU detectives were assisted by 15 other WSP detectives from around the state, along with deputies from the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office, detectives of the Major Crimes Units from both the Spokane Police Department and Spokane County Sheriff's Office, and detectives from the Arizona Department of Public Safety and officers from Nevada Sparks Police Department. This collaborative effort was key in the successful investigation and conviction of Benson for the death of Mr. Erdman.

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